

## The UAA/APU Encountering Controversy Project

is pleased to announce the

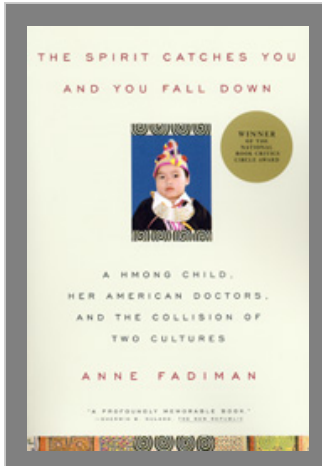
### Book of the Semester - Fall 2006 -

## *The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down*

By Anne Fadiman

Winner of the National Book Critics Circle Award

1998, Farrar, Straus & Giroux  
ISBN 0-374-52564-1



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This powerful book tells the story of Lia Lee, the infant daughter of Hmong immigrants in California, who was born with a severe seizure disorder, known in the West as epilepsy and to Lia's parents as *qaug dab peg* ("the spirit catches you and you fall down"). From the moment Lia arrives in a California emergency room, cultural differences and linguistic miscommunication begin to drive a rift between Lia's loving parents and her well-intentioned doctors. The tragedy that unfolds opens the door to conversations about cultural difference, the modern immigrant experience, and the limits of Western medicine.

Author Ann Fadiman holds the Francis chair for non-fiction writing at Yale University. She is past editor of the intellectual and cultural quarterly *The American Scholar*, a former writer for *Life* magazine and Editor-at-Large for *Civilization*. Her books include *The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down* and *Ex Libris: Confessions of a Common Reader*.

THE UAA/APU ENCOUNTERING CONTROVERSY PROJECT addresses the increasing polarization of our society and the need for university faculty to deal more effectively with breakdowns in civil discourse. It seeks to find a middle ground between voices that are so forceful that they overrun the complexities of other people, cultures, or traditions and voices that are too seldom heard because of personal or cultural inclination or because they have been intimidated into silence. The overall goal is to improve the learning climate on our campuses, making them more inclusive of minority voices and ways of knowing and safer places for learning and the free exchange of ideas.

ENCOUNTERING CONTROVERSY is one of 26 projects selected for funding by the Ford Foundation's nationwide *Difficult Dialogues* initiative. It was created in partnership between the University of Alaska Anchorage (UAA) and Alaska Pacific University (APU).

## Awards

National Book Critics Circle  
Award for General Nonfiction

*Los Angeles Times* Book Prize  
for Current Interest

Salon Book Award

*New York Times* Notable Book

Finalist, PEN/Martha Albrand  
Award for First Nonfiction

## Reviews

“An intriguing, spirit-lifting, extraordinary exploration of two cultures in uneasy coexistence... A wonderful aspect of Fadiman’s book is her even-handed, detailed presentation of these disparate cultures and divergent views — not with cool dispassionate fairness but rather with a warm involved interest that sees and embraces both sides of each issue...Superb, informal anthropology — eye-opening, readable, utterly engaging.”

— Carol Horne,  
*The Washington Post Book World*

“Ms. Fadiman tells her story with a novelist’s grace, playing the role of cultural broker, comprehending those who do not comprehend each other and perceiving what might have been done or said to make the outcome different.”

— Richard Bernstein  
*The New York Times*

## Issues

The issues raised by the book reach across many disciplines, including:

Sociology  
Philosophy  
Social Work  
Medical Ethics  
History

Anthropology  
Religion and Ethics  
Public Health  
Psychology  
Asian and International Studies

It raises issues of cultural assimilation and the conflicts between Western and traditional ways of knowing that can be used to engage students in local issues.

This book does use medical language and Hmong terms, so it may be a difficult read for some students. However, other universities have concentrated on the issues rather than the details with great success.

## Resources

There are many models and study guides available for how to teach this book in the classroom and how to use it for campus discussion groups.

A reader’s guide available from the publisher can be found at:  
<http://www.fsgbooks.com/readersguides/037452564IRG.pdf>

*The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down* has served or will be serving as Book of the Year at these other universities:

- University of North Carolina – Chapel Hill (2001)  
<http://www.unc.edu/srp/srp2001/>
- University of California – Davis (2002)  
[http://occr.ucdavis.edu/pilot\\_bookproject.html](http://occr.ucdavis.edu/pilot_bookproject.html)
- Hamline University (2002)  
<http://www.hamline.edu/cla/academics/firstyear/reading2002.htm>
- Concordia University – St. Paul (2005)  
<http://web.csp.edu/bookofyear/>
- Indiana University – South Bend (2007)



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